

Student Tip Sheet

Completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)



In California, you may apply for a Federal Pell Grant, a state Cal Grant or Graduate Fellowship, and many types of school-based student aid by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). There is no cost to the student to apply for financial aid when using the FAFSA. There are specialized programs and some schools with unique applications; check with a financial aid counselor for complete details.

Obtain the right applications

The FAFSA is available starting in November at high school counseling offices, career centers, libraries, colleges and other postsecondary school financial aid offices. You need only file one each year. FAFSA forms can also be obtained from the Federal Information Center at (800) 433-3243. The California Student Aid Commission, virtually all California state supported colleges and universities, and most independent institutions will accept the FAFSA.

Complete the application accurately

Carefully review the application instructions and provide accurate information. Obtain a \$.55 Certificate of Mailing from the Postal Service. Mail a completed form to the need analysis service which will determine your expected family contribution. **Make a copy of the completed form for your files.**

The need analysis service will send copies to the federal government for Pell Grant evaluation, colleges (up to six) you listed on the FAFSA, and an electronic record will be transmitted to the Commission. The need analysis service will send you a form, the Student Aid Report (SAR), acknowledging receipt of your application and will indicate the information used to determine your family contribution. Carefully review this form and submit any corrections as instructed as quickly as possible. You should receive your SAR within 4 weeks — if you do not receive your SAR, contact the processor directly at (319) 337-5665.

Apply for California Aid by March 2

To apply for a state-sponsored Cal Grant A, B, C or Graduate Fellowship, follow the instructions and complete the appropriate sections on the FAFSA. **Do not file before January 1. A completed FAFSA must be filed by the March 2, 1996 postmark deadline. In addition, any corrections to the FAFSA information must be made by that date. Applicants applying for a new Cal Grant or Graduate Fellowship must also file a GPA Verification Form with the Commission by the same deadline. Counselors and financial aid offices have complete information and materials.** The need analysis service will forward your application results to the Student Aid Commission which makes award notifications beginning in the spring. Renewal Cal Grant or Fellowship awards are evaluated by the school where you will be enrolled in the fall. Despite the FAFSA instructions, you **must** indicate on your FAFSA the California school you plan to attend in order to be considered for a state-sponsored award. Keep a copy of all financial aid forms filed by you.

The Federal Pell Grant deadline

Using the FAFSA, file as early as possible after January 1, 1996, but no later than May 1, 1997 (this is the 1996-97 school-year Pell Grant receipt deadline only). Four weeks after applying for a Pell Grant you will receive a Student Aid Report (SAR) which shows whether you are eligible for a Pell Grant.

Tips on applying for student aid

Every year, thousands of students are ineligible for financial aid because their applications are incomplete or filed too late. Here are some

tips to help students and their families successfully complete the financial aid application process.

- Study the California "Financial Aid for Students" workbook available from counselors and financial aid offices. Know available options and how the financial aid system works.
- Avoid waiting until the last minute to complete financial aid application materials. An early start will leave time to collect and correct information, ask questions, and solve problems.
- Use a pen with black or dark ink or a #2 pencil as instructed in the FAFSA application materials. Print clearly and neatly. Do not use "white out" or other correction fluid anywhere on the form.
- Use the 1996-97 FAFSA only for 1996-97 school year consideration.
- Do not use a FAFSA that is torn, crumpled or stained.
- Write only in the response areas and answer boxes on the form. Fill in the appropriate bubble for each response. Do not write in margins.
- Set aside at least one full afternoon or evening to work on the application. Assemble the needed materials ahead of time, including:
 - The FAFSA and any additional application materials required by the college or school.
 - The applicant's Social Security number. Most counseling offices have Social Security number applications (Federal Form SS-5), or students may get one from the local post office or Social Security Administration branch.
 - Family financial records, including:
 - a 1995 U.S. income tax return (Form 1040, 1040EZ, or 1040A) completed in early January will be most helpful; (If you have not filed your tax return, estimate income on the FAFSA. Do not send income tax forms with your FAFSA. If requested by a school or state agency, send a legible, signed photocopy of your income tax return directly to them.)
 - W-2 forms and other records of earnings in 1995;
 - current bank statements, mortgage information and business or farm records; records of medical and dental bills paid in 1995; and
 - records of veterans benefits or Social Security payments.
- Work carefully through the application. Follow all directions to apply for a Federal Pell Grant.
- If there are additional circumstances which you feel should be considered, send the additional information directly to the financial aid office at **each** school to which you apply. Be sure to put your name and Social Security number at the top of each page.
- Make a list of unanswered questions and, before mailing the application, check to make sure each question has been answered unless otherwise indicated by the FAFSA instructions. Make a photocopy of the completed application materials and keep the work copies of family financial statements.

Send the original FAFSA (not a photocopy) by first-class mail in the pre-addressed envelope found in the booklet. It is recommended that you get a Certificate of Mailing as proof of meeting the filing deadline. Do not use a special mailing service; it will delay processing of your form. If applying for a new Cal Grant or Graduate Fellowship, submit a completed GPA Verification form directly to the California Student Aid Commission by March 2, 1996. Keep copies of all financial aid forms you completed as well as Certificates of Mailing to verify you mailed the respective forms to their appropriate locations by the various deadlines.

Using the FAFSA in the Cal Grant and Fellowship Application Process



Only students who file a complete FAFSA and GPA Verification Form by the March 2, 1996 deadline will be notified of new Cal Grant or Graduate Fellowship eligibility. If you need help, contact a counselor, financial aid official or the California Student Aid Commission at (916) 445-0880. Renewal applicants should file a copy of their FAFSA with the school where they will be enrolled in fall 1996. Carefully read and follow all instructions when completing the FAFSA. **Here are some additional tips on completing the FAFSA when applying for a new Cal Grant or Graduate Fellowship.**

Section A: Yourself

Question 8: Your Social Security number. Answer accurately. Do not use this form if you do not have a Social Security number. Contact your college for special instructions.

Question 11: Your State of legal residence. If left blank, you will be eliminated from the competition for all Cal Grants and Graduate Fellowships.

Question 12: Date you became a legal resident. Be sure to indicate month, date and year (fill in all blanks). To be considered for California aid, you must verify "CA" as your state of legal residence at Question 11.

Section H: College Release and Certification

Questions

92-103: What college(s) do you plan to attend in 1996-97? Write in the complete name, city and state of the college(s) that you will most likely be attending during the 1996-97 school year. If the college you may attend is a branch campus, be sure to include the complete name. If the name or address is left incomplete, information on the form will not be forwarded to the school you plan to attend. If you know the school's USDE code number, you may list it in place of the school's address. Your high school counselor, financial aid office or public library should have a list of the USDE's six-digit codes. **At least one California school must be listed to be considered for a Cal Grant or Graduate Fellowship. Do not list a community college at question 92 as your first California school choice unless you are certain you will *not* attend a fee-charging school during the 1996-97 school year. DO NOT ABBREVIATE THE NAME OR ADDRESS OF THE COLLEGE(S).**

Question

104: The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) will send information from this form to your State agency and the State agencies of the college listed in questions 92-103.

Check "No" if you do not want your information released to the State.

If you check "No", any State student aid may be denied or delayed.

Questions

106-107 Certification. Everyone giving information must sign and date the form. Unsigned and/or undated forms will be returned unprocessed.

Additional Information

Questions

22-23: What is the highest grade level completed by your father and your mother? Both sections should be completed to assess maximum point eligibility for both Cal Grant B and Graduate Fellowship awards.

Section F

Income

Information: If you wish to be considered for a Graduate Fellowship, parental income information must be reported for both dependent and independent students.

Financial Aid Follow up

About four weeks from the date you mail the FAFSA to the need analysis service, you will begin to receive correspondence from a number of sources.

- The need analysis service, under contract with the U.S. Department of Education, will send a Student Aid Report (SAR), which provides information on eligibility for federal aid. It is your responsibility to carefully review the SAR for any errors, mistakes or misrepresentations. To correct your SAR, follow the directions on the SAR. As always, keep copies of all financial aid forms you file and obtain a Certificate of Mailing from the post office (currently .55) to verify your timely mailing.
- The aid administrator at each school you requested to receive the FAFSA analysis will send an analysis of your potential eligibility for scholarships and grants, work opportunities, loans and other financing options.
- The California Student Aid Commission also will send a letter regarding your eligibility for a Cal Grant, provided that you have been a California resident for at least one year prior to September 20, 1996, list a California school choice on your FAFSA, check the box giving permission to send your information to the California Student Aid Commission, and file a completed GPA Verification Form with the Commission.